

NOTE

Sassafras albidum: A New Host Plant Record for Larval
Melanolophia signataria (Lepidoptera: Geometridae) from
Central Virginia

Larvae of *Melanolophia signataria* (Walker) have been reported to feed on a wide variety of woody plants in eastern North America. Recorded host plants include: *Abies* spp. (firs), *Abies balsamea* (L.) Miller (balsam fir), *Acer* spp. (maples) *Alnus* spp. (alders), *Betula* spp. (birches), *Betula alleghaniensis* Britton (yellow birch), *Larix laricina* (DuRoi) K. Koch (tamarack), *Picea* spp. (spruces), *Picea glauca* (Moench) Voss (white spruce), *Populus* spp. (poplars), *Quercus* spp. (oaks) and *Ulmus americana* L. (American elm) (McGuffin, 1944. Canadian Entomologist 76: 124; Forbes 1948. Lepidoptera of New York and neighboring states. Part II. Memoir 274. Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station; Tietz 1952. The Lepidoptera of Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania Agricultural Experiment Station, Pennsylvania State College, State College, PA; Covell, 1984. A field guide to the moths of eastern North America. Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston, MA). Forbes (op cit) noted past confusion between larval host plants of *M. signataria* and the closely related *M. canadaria* (Guenee) and questioned the validity of some host plant records for both species. In this note I report a new, verified host plant record for larval *M. signataria* from central Virginia.

During early June 1991, I collected larval *M. signataria* from leaves of sassafras, *Sassafras albidum* (Nutt.) Nees, growing in a forest edge near Lovingson, Nelson County, Virginia, as part of a survey of the insect herbivore complex of *S. albidum*. Field-collected *M. signataria* larvae were confined to separate recloseable plastic sandwich bags containing fresh leaves of *S. albidum*

to determine: 1) if larvae actually feed and develop on *S. albidum*: or 2) if captures were incidental on a non-food host. Captive larvae of *M. signataria* fed readily on leaves of *S. albidum*, pupated, and emerged as adults within one month of collection, indicating that *S. albidum* is an acceptable host plant for larval feeding and development. cursory field surveys conducted in the same area during 1992 again noted the occurrence of larvae of *M. signataria* feeding on leaves of *S. albidum*, confirming the trophic association between insect and plant at this site.

Melanolophia signataria was by far the least numerous member of the larval lepidopteran fauna on *S. albidum* at the Virginia site (only three larvae could be collected for rearing in 1991), which was dominated by *Caloptilia sassafrasella* (Chambers) (Lepidoptera: Gracillariidae), *Epimecis hortaria* (F.) (Lepidoptera: Geometridae) and *Papilio troilus* L. (Lepidoptera: Papilionidae). It is uncertain if the relative rarity of larval *M. signataria* on *S. albidum* at the Virginia study site is due to the infrequency of the species in the area in general, to the presence of more desirable primary host plants on which adults preferentially oviposit, or because larvae feed on such a broad array of host plants that they are widely dispersed across numerous hosts.

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one anonymous referee made constructive comments on the manuscript. Voucher specimens are deposited in the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

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